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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

21 September 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Possible Developments in Iraq*

1. The situation in Iraq has grown even more uncertain since our last estimate (SNIE 36.2/2-59, "The Short-Term Outlook for Iraq," dated 30 June 1959). Qassim has continued certain moves to limit Communist activities, such as pulling the teeth of the Popular Resistance Forces. At the same time, these measures have been overshadowed by his failure as yet to move against the Communists for their part in the Kirkuk atrocities of mid-July, his public approval of pro-Communist Col. Mahdawi's antinationalist activities in the notorious People's Court, and yesterday's execution of Brigadier Tabaqchali and other participants in the Mosul uprising, as well as four civilian members of Nuri's last government.

* This memorandum has been discussed with OCI and DD/P.

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2. Predictions as to future developments must remain highly tentative. Despite Qassim's apparent popularity in the country, he has not yet developed an organization personally loyal to him. He probably still hopes to maintain the precarious equilibrium he thinks he has established between Communist and anti-Communist forces. He may be able to do so, possibly by counterbalancing the Tabaqchali execution with new moves to cut down Communist power. However, we believe that there is a better than even chance that the struggle for control of Iraq is about to enter another critical phase. The execution of Tabaqchali could easily serve as a catalyst for action in the tense situation. Such a crisis would not necessarily prove decisive, but it would probably involve more extensive disturbances and reprisals than have yet taken place.


3. Reports of coup plots, including the assassination of Qassim, have increased in recent weeks. Iraqi nationalists' disillusionment with Qassim is at a new peak and the UAR apparently once again fears increasingly that Qassim cannot be relied upon to keep Iraq out of Communist hands. Nasser has claimed that he is opposed to any new coup move at this time on the grounds that it would probably abort, but the UAR may find itself involved in a nationalist rising.

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4. Qassim and the Communists are both almost certainly aware that the nationalists may resort to desperate measures. Either or both may move to forestall a nationalist challenge, though we believe that the Communists would still hope to act in conjunction with Qassim. If the nationalists, either alone or with UAR help, do attempt a coup, the outcome will be uncertain. However, we believe that at best its chances of success would be no better than even at this time. Present trends indicate that a further weakening of anti-Communist ranks in Iraq is likely.

5. If this occurs, it would probably result in more acute and more overt hostility between Iraq and the UAR and consequently in increased turmoil in the Arab World and the Middle East generally. In such circumstances, both the West and the Communist Bloc would be likely to find themselves under pressure to play a more active role in the situation.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

 /
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